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## Exploring the values, the attitudes, and the experiences of Mexican-Americans toward education

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EXPLORING THE VALUES, THE ATTITUDES, AND THE  
EXPERIENCES OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS  
TOWARD EDUCATION

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Monica Victoria Pulido

June 2003

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by  
Monica Victoria Pulido


June 2003

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine Mexican-Americans values and attitudes toward education and to further explore some of the reasons Mexican-Americans drop out of school at such high rates. A qualitative method was used to conduct this study. The sample consisted of 21 Mexican-Americans over the age of 18 who attended Riverside community College and several who are employees of Val Verde School district. Participants were asked five questions. It was found Mexican-Americans really do value education because it provides more opportunities, better jobs, better lives, helps support their families, and avoids stereotypes. Findings also indicated that the possible factors leading to drop out among Mexican-Americans are financial problems and having to work. In addition, getting married young, becoming a teen mom, or having a family to support were possible contributing factors to dropout.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my lovely parents, Antonio Pulido and Maria Eugenia Pulido. I love you both dearly and it is because of you that I made it this far. Thank you for teaching me to strive for my goals and for having faith in me. As always, you both are in my heart and mind and will continue to be as long as I live. Rest in peace. Los amo con todo mi corazon!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter One presents an overview of the project. Chapter One will begin with a problem statement that introduces the population that will be the focus of this study. Then, Chapter One will discuss the policy and practice contexts that influence how the needs of this population are addressed and a description of the proposed study. Finally, Chapter One will present the purpose of the study and its significance for the social work profession.

#### Problem Statement

In today's society, education is seen as an essential tool for success in life. Children are socialized to attend school, be productive, and to hold successful jobs. Therefore, more parents are teaching their children the value of obtaining higher education for stability, better opportunities, success, and better self-esteem. If parents are indeed teaching the importance of an education, what then, can account for high dropout rates? Studies have found that in an American society where education is highly valued, dropping out of school has long been a concern (Davelos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). An

ever-increasing number of the nation's youth leave school without graduating (Rush & Vitale, 1994). Students belonging to Latino and other minority groups are more likely to face factors known to increase the likelihood of dropping out than are white students (Davelos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). Studies have indicated that Hispanics have the highest school dropout rates of any single ethnic group (Baruth & Manning, 1992) with a dropout rate for Mexican Americans of at least 40% (Darder, Torres, & Guitierrez, 1997). These findings necessitate an examination of the different factors that place Mexican-American children at a high risk of dropping out.

Past research has increased knowledge about different approaches that may decrease the staggering dropout rate of Mexican Americans; such important research benefits not only the individual students but also society-as-a-whole. There are several factors that have been shown to influence the ratio of Mexican-American students dropping out of school. Several of the factors that influence school: environmental factors, socioeconomic status, linguistic barriers, lack of knowledge, stereotypes, discrimination, cultural beliefs, and values. Of all these factors, most attention has been concentrated on socioeconomic status background. It has been found that

the high dropout rate among Latino youths serves to perpetuate the lower socioeconomic status of many Latino families across generations (Davelos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). However, discrimination and stereotyping have also long been possible causes of academic failure among this group. For instance, stereotypes of Mexicans being dirty, lazy, irresponsible, unambitious, promiscuous, prone to drinking, violence, and criminal behavior have all been shown to negatively affect school performance (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997). Also, past stereotypes made by teachers of Mexican American students have been shown to affect academic achievement. One publication read:

"The American children and those of Mexican children who are clean and high-minded do not like to go to school with the dirty "greaser" type of Mexican child...There is one choice in matter of educating these unfortunate children and that is to put the "dirty" ones in separate schools till they learn how to "clean-up" and become eligible to better society" (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997, p. 164).

Mexican American children have had to contend with demoralizing discrimination and negative stereotypes, which in turn, may influence their academic performance. This has been known as the "deficit thinking."

Aside from some of the external barriers that influence academic performance, it has been found that cultural factors internal to the Mexican-American community may exacerbate the external factors influencing higher education. Children learn about the nature of the world in which they live through parental socialization; this encompasses cultural beliefs, values, and customs. Parents transmit their culture to their young by teaching them how to think, act, and feel. For that reason, part of that transmittal is the act of socializing children to value education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Numerous researchers have disputed the "deficit thinking" theory by concluding that Mexican-American families do indeed value education for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992) and that when parents are involved in their youths' schooling, children do better in school (Valencia & Black, 2002). Yet, other research indicates that Mexican American families do not value education (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Since the value of education may vary from culture to culture, and from family to family, this study will explore the values and attitudes of Mexican-Americans toward education as well as the contributing factors to the high dropout rate among the Mexican-American population. The importance of this proposed study is not

only to provide a richer understanding of Mexican-Americans' values, struggles, and obstacles in obtaining an education, but also to gain insight into the issue of high dropout rate for this population.

#### Policy/Social Practice Context

With regard to the value of education, there has been a historical and contemporary struggle for equal opportunity among many Mexican-Americans who have strived for a better education for their children. One example is the long battle for bilingual education. Parents have fought for bilingual education so their children could understand lessons and pay attention. For decades, Mexican-Americans have expressed their collective interest and action in promoting better education for children and youth by engaging in public protestations in a display of dissatisfaction with oppression, with the goal of gaining resources such as bilingual programs (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Bilingual education has a long and complex history in the United States. For example, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 4% of the students in public and parochial schools were receiving some or all of their instruction in German (Bahamonde, 1999). However, during

World War I anti-German sentiment resulted in rejection of bilingual education. A rebirth of bilingual education occurred in the 1960s. In 1968, President Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act, which became a step toward the promotion of individuals' language rights. The 1970s saw passage of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, which in turn prompted the widespread implementation of bilingual education programs. But, between 1980 and 1990, federal funding under the Bilingual Education Act was cut by 47%. President Reagan stated that it was wrong and against American concepts to have a bilingual education program (Bahamonde, 1999). More recently, a group known as U.S. English has proved to be a strong oppositional force for linguistic diversity. In 1998, this group largely eliminated bilingual education from state public schools. Overall, since the 1960s, bilingual education has been characterized primarily by controversy and shifting federal policy.

The need for and interest in bilingualism and second-language acquisition has grown in recent years because of changing demographics in the United States. However, bilingual education is now marked by controversy and conflicting ideas about the practices (Bahamonde, 1999). Today, an alternative is to apply knowledge and

best practice from the field of special education to bilingual programs, specifically by implementing a model of co-teaching based on collaboration (Bahamonde, 1999). Co-teaching is a service-delivery model that appears to be a means for assisting general education teachers to better address the diversity of student needs they now encounter in their classrooms. It offers ongoing classroom participation by students with special needs who are taught at least a small part of the day through instructional partnerships formed by general education and special education teachers (Bahamonde, 1999).

Studies continue to show that Mexican-Americans have indeed valued education, and that they continue to do so. Although there has been a long struggle for equal education, in many school sites Mexican-Americans and other minorities still receive inferior treatment and feel discriminated against. Therefore, it is important that social work practice address the different needs of minority children and, in particular, those children that are at risk of failing in school, those affiliated with gangs, and those who have behavioral problems that may induce destructive behavior towards oneself or society.



## The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the values and attitudes of Mexican-Americans toward education as well as to explore contributing factors leading to the high rate of dropout among that population. This study sought to answer the following questions: 1) Do Mexican-Americans really value education? 2) Do Mexican-American values and attitudes play a role in whether Mexican-Americans dropout of school or not? And, 3) What could be the situational or contributing factors that hinder academic achievement for Mexican-American? This is highly relevant to social work practice because Mexican-Americans are the largest undereducated group in the United States, with only 3.7% of women and 6.1% of men graduating from college (Nieman & Romero, 2000) This study sought to identify the risk factors for school dropout for Mexican-Americans.

Studies have found that parental involvement, along with the parental valuation of education affects students' academic performance tremendously. Therefore, there may be a need for programs and other resources to educate the parents and the Mexican-American population to excel in their studies.

The research design for this study was qualitative. A qualitative approach was used to gather in-depth understanding of the different "realities" of a few Mexican-Americans that were interviewed in this study. The primary purpose of this approach is the exploration of people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world or "reality" (Grinnell, 2002). In utilizing a qualitative approach, the aim of the study was to answer various questions and to provide a richer understanding of Mexican-Americans' struggles and obstacles in obtaining an education.

The data source for this study was Mexican Americans from Riverside Community College (RCC) and staff from the Val Verde School district. The sample consisted of 21 Mexican-Americans who are 18 years of age and older. Some of the limitations of this study were: 1) an instrument was developed by the researcher; therefore, its validity and reliability are not known, and 2) a small sample size compromises the representation of the Mexican-American population. Nonetheless, for this study, a qualitative approach was useful for its stated purpose.

## Significance for Social Work Practice

This research will impact social work on various levels. By studying one ethnic group and giving particular attention to Mexican-Americans, social workers can become more aware of the many obstacles minorities face, which in turn can help social workers understand the environmental factors as well as the cultural values that influence education. One example of a cultural value among Mexican-Americans is referred to as "familism", which means honoring duties toward the family before external obligations (Shapiro & Simonsen, 1994, p. 408). The focus of this study is significant to social work practice for the following reason: if Mexican-Americans are not encouraged, supported, and persuaded to continue their education, they will not be able to maintain or support a family, they will be unable to contribute to the economy as self-sufficient individuals, and they may be unsuccessful in their pursuit of better-paying jobs.

In addition to understanding the values transmitted to children, the impact of this research can extend beyond the individual child to institutions including agencies and school sites. School social workers can intervene by working with the families of potential Mexican-American student dropouts. These social workers can help create

comprehensive parent programs centered on educating parents about their children's needs. For instance, parents may not know how to motivate or encourage their offspring to pursue a higher education because the parents themselves have not acquired a significant level of education. Therefore, the findings of a study like this can guide social workers to help empower parents so they can feel competent and confident in helping their children with school. Social workers can empower parents in four ways: 1) establish basic communication between parents and teachers, 2) improve the home environment to enhance home learning, 3) encourage volunteering, and 4) provide advocacy (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Social workers can help parents get involved with their child's schooling to improve their academic success. It has been found that when low-income parents are trained to work with children, they develop better attitudes, become more active, and help support school activities (Pena, 2001). Therefore, not only will children benefit from parental involvement in their education, parents themselves can work on their own well-being and self-confidence as individuals. Thus, parents can learn to advocate for their rights and attend to the needs of their children.

Apart from empowering parents, by examining the needs of Mexican-Americans, social work practice can also become culturally sensitive to the different practices and values of Mexican-American families. Social workers can become more aware of limitations facing Mexican-Americans involving transportation, childcare, and language, which may all have a hindering effect on academic success.

The study that was conducted is needed for social work practice because previous research had focused on the Hispanic or Latino population, not solely on Mexican-Americans. Conducting a study that concentrated solely on Mexican-Americans can contribute toward the goal of attaining a better understanding of the unmet needs of a subgroup within an ethnic group. Not all Hispanics or Latinos share the same values and beliefs, and therefore, a new perspective on Mexican culture and values would be able to guide social workers seeking to better-assist at-risk families.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter two consists of a discussion of the literature relevant to this study. This section is divided into a section on two theories that help guide the conceptualization of this population, a section on Mexican-Americans' cultural and educational values, and two sections on parental involvement and factors influencing parental involvement in the educational system.

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

For the purpose of this study, theories guiding the study can be explained from two theoretical perspectives, cultural/ecological theory and context-specific explanation. According to Ogbu (1981) the cultural/ecological perspective is a framework derived from the work of anthropologist Julian Steward and his followers. They define cultural ecology as the study of institutionalized and socially transmitted patterns of behavior interdependent with the environment (Ogbu, 1981). In other words, from the perspective of cultural ecology, the child-rearing practices of a population are not an

irrational or random set of activities; they form part of a culturally organized system, which evolves through generations of collective experiences in tasks designed to meet environmental demands (Obgu, 1981).

With regard to the purpose of this study, the cultural/ecological perspective is relevant because it focuses on the external limitations imposed on Mexican-Americans by the dominant culture. According to cultural/ecological theory, minority groups within the United States are not comprehensively considered at the institutional and policy levels; therefore, have been prevented from gaining access to educational opportunities. In addition, minorities face other factors that limit their success in academic settings including family beliefs, values, and environmental factors. As a result, according to cultural/ecological theory, Mexican-American parents may provide a home context in which there is less motivation and emphasis to do well in school. Rather than thinking this way, this theory will focus more on the cultural systems and experiences of Mexican-Americans to understand the environmental demands that they need to meet.

On the other hand, according to Tharp (1989), the context-specific perspective posits that there are two

types of cultures and therefore two types of most effective classrooms, For example, the majority culture and all school-successful minorities and those cultures whose students typically experience problems in schools. From this perspective, students from different cultures have notably different experiences of school. For instance, lower academic achievement by Mexican-American children is an indicator of the differences between the majority culture and their behavioral norms, social customs, and ways of thinking and communicating.

In utilizing this perspective, the researcher was interested in understanding how a certain culture's values and beliefs influence its members, as well as the ways in which these values and beliefs manifest themselves in actual behavior. For example, according to the context-specific view, parents may have less practical knowledge about carrying out school tasks and about the school system itself. In incorporating this perspective, it is important to look not only at the mezzo level, that is, at the agency and institutional level for occurring issues, but also at a micro level, that is, the individual and the context of the specific problem.

The central guiding principle of this perspective was to make the organization of teaching, learning, and



performance compatible with the social structures in which students are most productive, engaged, and likely to learn (Tharp, 1989). In using these two theories, the researcher hoped to reach a better understanding of Mexican-Americans' valuation of education and their environment.

### Mexican-Americans' Cultural and Educational Values

The perception of education as being interesting and important has been defined in terms of whether one intrinsically values schooling (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). It has been found that intrinsic value is a primary component of academic success and those who did value education exhibited more effort and better performance (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). Furthermore, it has been well documented that a social setting that is perceived as supportive can foster adjustment and well-being despite a variety of external stressors.

However, one's perception of education as being non-valued may further depress the already low academic achievement levels of less advantaged youth (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). Therefore, it is important that minorities' perception of education be positive and

that these perceptions manifest themselves through actions. In other words, Mexican-American youth whose ethnic behaviors and attitudes are incompatible with the requirements of schooling may be less likely to fulfill these demands. However, if the student is socially taught to value education, then they will be more open to adhering to these educational demands and therefore, be more successful.

A study conducted by Delgado-Gaitan (1992), was interested in how parents convey the value of education through the parent-child relationship. Delgado-Gaitan (1992) examined Mexican-American families from one community located in Carpinteria, California. Her study examined six different families' day-to-day parent-child interactions concerning education and household issues. From the interviews and through observations of parent-child interactions, several significant findings emerged. First, Mexican-American parents, despite the fact that they had not received a formal education, regarded schooling as a great privilege for their children. Parents provided children with the appropriate emotional support that encouraged them to value education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Parents expected their children to get good education in order to diversify their opportunities for

employment and to strengthen the possibility of becoming professionals. This expectation was expressed to their children by sharing stories of their own educational limitations as well as articulating their desire that they remain in school, complete their education, and go beyond the parents' own limited accomplishments.

Findings indicated that family social resources were crucial factors directly affecting the accessibility of the educational system. In other words, familiarity with the educational system had a great deal to do with the parents' ability to guide their children through the school system. Last, findings indicated that for parents, receiving a better education meant that in addition to improving their socioeconomic status, offspring were also expected to acquire certain values and morals. Among these were being considerate towards others, and displaying kindness, respect for elders and authority, and cooperation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). One was considered "*buen educado*" (well educated) if he or she was considerate of others, kind, cooperative, and respectful of elders and authority. To be "*buen educado*" did not require formal schooling. In contrast, one would be viewed as "*mal educado*" (poorly educated) if he or she mistreated others or did not respect the rights of others. A person

could be considered "*mal educado*" regardless of the amount of formal education he or she had received (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

Overall, these findings presented a comprehensive study that supported the fact that different cultures may value education for different reasons other than the most obvious or expected. In this case, it is evident that Mexican-American families not only emphasize the value of education, but also place a premium on being accepted in society as well-mannered individuals. In other words, Mexican-Americans place a strong emphasis on respect and deference to authority. Whether Mexican-Americans value their elders and respect authorities because they have been culturally taught that this was the norm or whether it's because of their religious beliefs, is uncertain. The study has shown important findings that should not be overlooked, but rather, should be further explored.

Besides wanting children to grow into well-mannered individuals, recent research has found that Mexican immigrant parents ascribed a higher degree of importance to the task of teaching children socially conforming behaviors than on teaching them socially autonomous behaviors (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993). Conforming behaviors are behaviors such as obeying school rules.

Autonomous behaviors are teaching children independency. Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) studied parent beliefs about child rearing, conceptions of intelligence, and academic goals. Significant findings indicated that for Mexican immigrant parents, the emphasis on conformity in academic and social school goals was stronger than that of Anglo-American parents. Interestingly, for Mexican-Americans higher value was placed on the autonomy and creativity of their children, something contradictory to what will be found in later studies. The findings indicated important values embedded in one's culture; however, this study was limited to only certain types of behaviors found in different cultures rather than explaining in more detail the effects of certain behaviors on academic goals.

Other studies have also provided evidence that Mexican-American families value education. Okagaki and Frensch (1995) conducted a study to identify parental beliefs and behaviors associated with scholastic success among Mexican-American children. They examined six aspects of parenting: educational values, educational expectations, perceptions of the child's ability, perceptions of parental efficacy, perceptions of racial barriers, and self-reported behaviors related to school

work and modeling of reading in parents of high and low-achieving Mexican-American children. Parents of fourth and fifth grade students in three neighboring suburban school districts in northern California participated in this study. Each school district identified high and low-achieving fourth and fifth grade student based on their scholastic achievement test scores.

Okagaki and Frensch's (1995) study reported several valuable findings. With respect to the valuation of education, parents of both high and low achievers indicated that, "to have a good education is more important than to have a lot of money." In addition, both agreed that, "a good education is the best way to get a good job." For the most part, both of these results are consistent with previous research findings reporting that Mexican-American parent's value education. Furthermore, with regard to perceptions of the relationship between education and job prospects for the target child, the majority of parents in both groups reported that they did not believe that their child could get a good job without finishing high school. In addition, questions on educational expectations found that all parents expected their children to at least graduate from high school; and

most parents (85% of high achievers; 67% of low achievers) expected their child to graduate from college.

Overall, this study showed that not all parent's educational standards was consistent with their beliefs. For instance, parents of high achievers were more likely to indicate that they would be upset and want their children to do better if their children received grades of Cs and Ds. In contrast, one fourth of the parents of low achievers indicated that they would be happy or satisfied if their children received a D (Okagaki & Frensch, 1995). Many important questions remained unanswered with regard to whether parents practice what they teach their children.

In earlier research Delgado-Gaitan (1992) have argued that Mexican-American parents are supportive of their children's school achievement but lack the knowledge or skills to help their children with schoolwork. Can this finding be supported? Okagaki and Frensch (1995) found that parents of low-achieving students were more likely to believe that they should play a role in helping their children with their schoolwork. However, they also found racial barriers, low self-confidence, and time constraints limited the actual time parents spent helping their children with schoolwork. Therefore, in order to

contribute to Mexican-Americans' scholastic achievement, Okagaki and Frensch (1995) suggest one should recognize the importance and effects of several factors beyond parental beliefs and behaviors.

Another way of determining what influences academic achievement is through the identification of academic resilience in Mexican-American students. This is an interesting way in understanding how educational values play a role in academic achievement. Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) sought to identify factors that contributed to academic resilience and achievement among Mexican-American high school students. In general, academically resilient students are described as students "who sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and ultimately dropping out of school" (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). In addition, for a student to be considered resilient, the student must be at risk for negative outcomes. Since most Mexican-Americans fit this profile, they were appropriate for this study.

Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found several sources of resilience. It was found that a student's subjective appraisal of the school environment is an important factor



that influences outcomes; therefore, a sense of belonging to school was important. In addition, family and peer support and value placed on school were consistent predictors of academic resilience. In other words, it was found that "familism", mentioned previously as one of the important values practiced by Mexican Americans, was a significant predictor of resilience status. For that reason, it can be assumed that to some degree family educational values do influence whether a student drops out of school or whether the student decides to stay in school. Since the study focused on the resiliency of Mexican-Americans, the findings are important for future studies to explore more in the area of resiliency rather than failures within minority groups.

As mentioned before, cultural factors endemic to the ethnic group may exacerbate external and economic barriers to the pursuit of higher education for Mexican American students. Niemann and Romero (2000) examined the relationship between components of cultural orientation and attitudes and values that may create tension between relationship and educational goals for Mexican American men and women. Examples of the cultural factors internal to the Mexican American community that may exacerbate the external obstacles include the behavior patterns

inconsistent with traditional cultural gender roles, and attitudes that may lead to perceptions of conflict between relationship and educational goals. Niemann and Romero (2000) demonstrate interesting findings that also underlie the relatively low achievement and high rate of dropout of Mexican-American students and reasons that Mexican-American families from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience conflicts between educational goals and family obligations.

Findings from Niemann and Romero's (2000) study reveal that the valuation of education differs between genders. For men, education is valued as a mechanism for improving oneself so that he can secure a better job, make more money, and be able to provide for his family. On the other hand, for women, a higher education is not valued as it is for a man. It is perceived as unnecessary and wasteful. Instead, the primary role of Mexican-American women is one who prioritizes marriage and family life. Niemann and Romero (2000) found that women in the study perceived themselves to be nurturing caregivers to the family because it was expected from them. Evidencing the perception of an education as unnecessary and wasteful, women felt that attending to the familial needs was a value and priority.

Although it was found that a Mexican-American man received more positive messages while attending college than women (Niemann & Romero, 1997), it was also found that they might still experience a conflict between their educational goals and familial obligations. For instance, the pursuit of an education may be seen as a delay in supporting the family of low socioeconomic status. For some Mexican-American families, having a hardworking man who provides for his family is valued more than an education. Overall, stereotyped attitudes about role definitions for women and men in traditional Latin cultures restrict educational aspirations and limit levels of achievement (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997). This study was insightful in that it explicitly discussed the effects of traditional sex-roles on educational goals. This is important because it helps us to fully understand the values of a culture.

In contrast to the previous findings, Hernandez et al. (1994) have found that Mexican-American mothers have high levels of academic expectations of their daughters to reach higher education. They conducted an exploratory case study designed to yield information regarding the tri-generational aspirations of Mexican-American women. They found that mother's expectations, involvement, and

role modeling has a lasting impact on their daughter's educational development. And, because past research has shown Mexican-American females as being the most underrepresented major ethnic group of those completing four or more years of college (Baruth & Manning, 1992) this study specifically examined each mother's role in relation to her daughter's academic aspirations.

Findings of the study reported that the mother was increasingly cited across each subsequent generation as the person who most encouraged educational success (Hernandez, Vargas-Lew, & Martinez, 1994). In other words, Mexican-American mothers have high academic expectations for their daughters and tend to be the most significant factor related to achievement by their daughters. However, with regards to the importance and level of aspiration of education, it was also noted that there were differences between mothers and grandmothers. For example, although grandmothers reported high levels of perceived importance of education for their daughters (mothers), mothers' reported aspirations for professional careers were inconsistent with the moderate levels of perceived importance of education. Interestingly, although neither grandmothers nor mothers reached career aspirations to any

appreciable degree, this study provided a good representation of the values among different generations.

Previous research has indicated that the encouragement from mothers for daughters to aspire to an education and to value education is important; however, external family barriers may still get in the way of obtaining an education. Prewitt Diaz (1992) distinguished four possible factors that affect children's academics. The four factors are ecological, educational, psychological, and economical. The effects of each factor hinder a child's success at higher learning. In brief, findings included that adjusting to schools was difficult for children. Prewitt Diaz (1992) found that there is a constant process of adjustment to school and to the curriculum. Not only did the students have to make new friends but they also had to adjust to new ideas. Findings also included that teachers had an impact on children's achievement. Children succeeded when teachers believed they would do well and performed poorly when teachers expected them to fail. In addition, language was found to be a barrier. Language created a situation in which children did not understand the material presented in class due to lack of linguistic comprehension. Changing

schools also had an effect on whether or not students did well in school.

Furthermore, Prewitt Diaz (1992) took into account the low self-esteem that most students develop as a result of the negative stereotypes with which they must contend. Last but not least, Prewitt Diaz (1992) emphasized the importance of children contributing to the financial situation at home. From this finding, it becomes clear that Mexican-American children do not always have the opportunity to go to school, and even if they do, many of them may have to drop out to work and keep the family financially solvent or because of other factors as previously mentioned. Overall, these findings demonstrate various ways that Mexican-Americans can be affected in the educational system. Findings are valuable in further exploring this population.

Interestingly, Prewitt Diaz (1992) also studied the migrants' perceptions of education for their children. The purpose of his study was to explore factors that affect the education of migrant children. It was found that the Mexican child contributed economically to the family. In other words, migrants failed to value education and instead emphasized the value and importance of a hard-working child who dedicates him/herself to the

family's economic progress. Among the participants in the study, children in the household were contributing about 80% of the money they earned to their families (Prewitt Diaz, 1992).

Findings of this study are very much at odds with the previous findings indicating the high value Mexican-American families place on education. Perhaps, the difference is that Mexican-Americans value education because of the long struggle to locate to another country for better opportunities. And, on the other hand, migrants worked hard to find more available jobs to support their families. Comparing migrant workers and Mexican-Americans who migrated into this country, the reality is that they live in two different worlds. Therefore, based on their needs and expectations, they also acquire different priorities in life. Since the focus of the study was on Mexican-Americans, the study was limited in findings that represent the large population of Hispanics and migrant children.

As mentioned previously, factors such as low-socioeconomic status, stereotypes, and discrimination have been shown to hinder Mexican-Americans in their struggle to reach higher education. For many, these issues are seen as the rationale behind Mexican- Americans

failure to value education and the reasons why they dropout of school. Therefore, for a better understanding, Valencia and Black (2002) have refuted findings that claim Mexican-Americans do not value education, and have dismissed them as the perpetuation of a myth. Valencia and Black (2002) have examined this myth in three ways. First, they have suggested that the basis for the myth lies in the pseudoscientific notion of "deficit thinking" an ideology that blames the victim rather than examining how schools and the political economy are structured to prevent students from learning. Deficit thinking refers to the idea that the students, particularly those of low-socioeconomic background and color, fail in school because they and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process. Because this myth asserts that Mexican-Americans do not value education, it has been argued that this leads to inadequate familial socialization for academic competence, which in turn contributes to the school failure of Mexican-American children and youth (Valencia & Black, 2002).

The second way that the myth has been examined has been through an exploration of master's theses, and published scholarly literature, particularly from the



"*culture deprivation*" and "at risk" child categories. From that exploration, it was found that the myth, "Mexican-Americans do not value education" was also based on the deficit model and stereotypes. In addition, "*culture deprivation*" literature has found since the 1960s, that the "*culturally deprived*" child (also referred to as the "*culturally disadvantaged*" and "socially disadvantaged") was socially constructed (Valencia and Black, 2002). It has been stated that the "*socially disadvantaged*" child lacks..."Two parents who: read a good deal to him, show him that they believe in the value of education, and rewards him for good school achievement" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 86). And, because Mexican-American children and their families among other racial and ethnic groups were a targeted population of the 1960s, the term "*culturally deprived*" fit that group. Moreover, the "at risk" child literature has found that part of the problem with the concept of *at-risk* is that it tends to overlook any strengths and promise in the student labeled as at-risk.

Assessing the myth, "Mexican Americans don't value education" Valencia and Black (2002) have provided discourse on how the myth can be debunked. This study has provided useful information that deserves more attention.

It has been reported that setting high expectations for the completion of school and expressing the desire for children to further their education or to surpass the parents' educational level, appeared to be powerful and pervasive beliefs and attitudes among Mexican-American families.

### Parental Involvement

With respect to parental involvement, Valencia and Black (2002) along with Pena (2001) have shown that parents' involvement in their children's schooling may have many positive benefits for their students, the most important of which is enhancing student achievement. Valencia and Black (2002) found that Mexican-American parents reported external and internal involvement with school, both of which are beneficial to their children. For example, members of Mexican-American families discussed their external involvement in education through service, teacher contacts, and school visits. Furthermore, besides straightforward concerns like homework, school attendance, and parents school visits, Valencia and Black (2002) showed that family conversations within the home revealed attitudes toward education that go a long way in debunking the myth of lack of concern.

Pena (2001) undertook a yearlong case study of the involvement of Mexican American parents in their children's education at an elementary school in Texas. Interviews, document analyses, and observations of parent activities revealed that parent involvement was influenced by several factors including language, parent cliques, parents' education, attitude's of the school staff, cultural influences, and family issues. The main question directing Pena's (2001) study was how Mexican-American parents were or were not involved in their children's education and what factors influenced their involvement. She was interested in understanding these factors and finding ways to increase and improve parent involvement. As part of Pena's (2001) study, she not only described the numerous benefits of parental involvement in a child's learning process, but also those benefiting the parents themselves. For instance, parental involvement positively affected classroom learning as well as the school environment. In addition, there were positive outcomes for parents such as the development of better attitudes, increased activity, and increased support of school activities. They also begin to seek additional education for themselves and developed higher educational aspirations for their children (Pena, 2001).

## Factors Influencing Parent Involvement

Many times parents have reasons for not being involved in their children's schooling despite the efforts made by the school. Pena (2001) has identified several reasons for the noninvolvement of parents in her study.

- 1) Language. The influence of linguistic differences was apparent at parent meetings. English seemed to be the preferred language at most parent meetings and this was a drawback for Mexican-American parents.
- 2) Parent cliques. Mexican-American parents felt unwelcome at parent conferences.
- 3) Parent's education. Limited education often affected school participation because parents did not voice their concerns.
- 4) Attitudes of the school staff. Despite the teachers' ability to speak to parents in their home language, their attitudes influenced parental involvement.
- 5) Cultural influences. It was shown that Mexican American parents preferred to be involved in the social part of their children's schooling, such as organizing school parties instead of other school functions.

- 6) Family issues. Familial issues in addition to the parents' education and language also influenced parental involvement. Circumstances such as the availability of transportation and childcare had a significant effect on whether parents could participate in school events (Pena, 2001).

In conclusion, Pena's (2001) study provided a better understanding of the effects parent involvement has in their children's schooling as well as the other factors that influence parents in assisting their children. Pena (2001) recognizes that the educational level, language, culture, and home situations of parents are considered as important measures that would result in students' needs being met and thereby helping them excel further in their education.

### Summary

The literature important to the project was presented in Chapter Two. The combination of studies shown in this chapter, show that the value of education cannot be separated from cultural differences. Some examples of the cultural differences are the way a family was socialized to behave, the customs they practice, the beliefs they

value, the adjustment they make to their new surroundings, and the obstacles they need to overcome. From the studies presented in Chapter Two, it can be concluded that before anyone can understand how one ethnic group values education they need to take into consideration all of the above.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documents the methods used in conducting the project. Chapter Three discusses the study design, sampling, data collection, instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and the data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was 1) to examine Mexican-American values and attitudes toward education, and 2) to further explore some of the reasons Mexican-Americans drop out of school at such high rates. A qualitative approach, utilizing open-ended questions relevant to the content, was used to gather in-depth understanding of the different "realities" of a few Mexican-Americans who were interviewed in this study.

In utilizing a qualitative research approach, the aim of the study was to answer the various research questions and to provide a richer understanding of Mexican-Americans struggles and obstacles in obtaining an education. A phenomenological approach, that is, the exploration of

people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world has been incorporated in this study.

There are several limitations in using the qualitative approach. An instrument was developed by the researcher to gather the results; therefore, its validity and reliability are not known. Also, a sample size of 21 has been used to represent a population.

Aside from the principal inquiry of the study, several other questions were explored. 1) Do Mexican-Americans really value education? 2) Do Mexican-Americans' values and attitudes towards education play a role in whether Mexican-Americans dropout of school or not? 3) What could be the situational or contributing factors that hinder academic achievement for Mexican-Americans?

### Sampling

A purposive sample of 21 Mexican-Americans was utilized for this study. The sampling criteria included ethnicity and age: participants identified themselves as Mexican-American and were at least 18 years or older. Mexican-American adults were chosen from two sources. First, sixteen participants were students from Riverside Community College (RCC) enrolled in a sociology course.



Second, five participants were Mexican-American staff working in the Val Verde school district. The staff who participated are employees of after school programs at Manuel Real Elementary and Mead Valley Elementary School. The positions held by these employees consisted of tutors and facilitators. From both sources, all participants had a variety of demographic characteristics including levels of education.

These two sources were chosen because of the large availability of Mexican-American population in both locations. Also, both sources provided a diverse group of participants for the study. Participants from RRC offered a different educational experience; their struggles and obstacles to get to college have shown to be somewhat different compared to those who may not attend college. A combination of both sources has provided a richer understanding and representation of Mexican-Americans. However, the limitation of this sampling is that only two sources will be utilized, thus, also compromising the representation of the Mexican-American population.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Every individual from RCC attending the sociology course had equal opportunity to participate if they met the sampling criteria. That is, if volunteers identified themselves as

Mexican-American and were over 18 years of age they were considered appropriate for this study and invited to participate. The sampling criteria also applied to the staff from Val Verde school district, however, the interviews with staff was narrowed down; staff who were accessible during after school hours were targeted. The sample excluded teachers, counselors, and security personnel and allowed after school tutors and program facilitators to be interviewed.

#### Data Collection and Instrument

Data was collected using an instrument that included five open-ended questions. The instrument included questions pertaining to the values and attitudes toward education of Mexican-Americans. Questions also examined whether educational values has been passed on to other generations. Furthermore, questions explored other factors that have placed Mexican-Americans at risk for school dropout. In addition, questions allowed the participants to express other relevant information pertaining to the study. Overall, the instrument allowed participants to freely express, share, and formulate stories they had experienced throughout their life (Appendix D).

At the end of the open-ended questions, eight demographic questions were asked. The questions were asked using nominal and scale levels of measurement. Question numbers 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were measured with a nominal measurement. And, question numbers 2 and 4 were measured with a scale measurement. These questions included: age, marital status, household income, gender, number of years in the U.S.A, language preference, generation, and highest level of education completed.

The researcher responsible for this study developed an instrument of five open-ended questions because no other instrument was found to fully consider the values and attitudes that influence Mexican-American families. Therefore, an instrument that encompasses demographics, values, attitudes, and other precipitating factors of school dropout was created to optimize the results of the study. To minimize all the possible inconsistencies and bias that the questions may have, the instrument was pre-tested on one Mexican-American individual who fit the criteria of the study population but who was not included in the study.

## Procedures

Permission to study Mexican-Americans at RCC and at Val Verde school district was received from the Department of the Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino. Before the data were collected in early February, the college students were first notified about the study by the professor of the sociology class. Once the researcher was notified by the professor that sixteen students were interested, the researcher went to describe the study and re-invited participants. Rather than randomly choosing ten students to participate, the researcher decided to interview all sixteen. As for the staff from Val Verde, an announcement was made to the employees involved in after school programs. Then, the researcher also visited to describe and invite participants. Interviews were held in a quiet room that was available to the participant and the researcher.

After the participants were chosen and accessible to the researcher, before starting the interview they were notified that they would receive an informed consent along with a debriefing statement. The debriefing statement included contact information for an agency available to participants if they felt uncomfortable or distressed as a

result of their participation in the study. Participants were also told that interviews would last 25-30 minutes, and that all answers to the questions would remain confidential and that their identity would not be revealed. Also, participants were informed that the results of the study would be available after June 2003.

In order to accommodate to participants' linguistic preferences, interviews in Spanish were also available to them if needed since the researcher is bilingual. Data collection was completed once participants were fully informed and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Participants in this study were given an informed consent form and a debriefing statement. To protect the human subjects who participated in this study, the researcher kept the data confidential by assuring that notes and other information from the participant would only be available to the researcher and the faculty advisor.

All the information collected at the time of the interview was kept in a file cabinet at the researcher's home for the duration of the study. Collected data from

the interviews was coded and entered into the researchers' personal computer. And, all identifying information was kept confidential. Once data analysis was completed, all the data collected were destroyed. The computer file deleted all identifying information gathered to ensure that the confidentiality of each participant was not compromised.

### Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the values and attitudes towards education of Mexican-Americans as well as other precipitating factors that may lead to school dropout rates. The purpose of the data analysis was to analyze and interpret volumes of data that were collected by the researcher. The researcher transcribed the data verbatim and then later developed a coding scheme and assigned codes to the meaning units. The researcher was interested in finding patterns, themes, and categories, within the volumes of data that were read and reread for analysis. Therefore, the researcher spent a good amount of time comparing and contrasting among various demographic groups from the two sources.

The researcher looked for patterns and themes that help capture how the research participants experienced the

issues that this study looked at. Overall, the ultimate goal of the researcher was to interpret data in such a way that the true expressions of research participants were revealed so that a more comprehensive understanding of the social problem could be identified.

### Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to explain not only the purpose of the study but also to organize and formulate how the process of conducting the study was carried out; therefore, each section of this chapter is important. It is important to understand each section thoroughly for the sake of being able to later replicate the design or to gather more information for future studies of a related topic. In addition, this chapter addressed the limitations, interests, and the design of the proposed study to contribute to other researchers or studies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Chapter Four documents the presentation of the results of the study. It reports and summarizes common and major themes of 21 respondents who participated and answered five questions pertaining to the study. In addition, Chapter Four concludes with a summary.

#### Presentation of Findings

The sample consisted of twenty-one Mexican-American women and men. Fourteen out of sixteen participants were female (66.7%) and 33.3 % were male. In addition, from the total sample there were sixteen college students and five staff who are employees at the Val Verde school district. The ages ranged from 17 to 44. The largest group of participants was between the ages of 17 and 21 (38.1%). The next largest age group of participants was between the ages 29 and 34 (24%).

From the sample of 21 participants, 57.1% were single and 28.6% were married. In addition, 57.1% had high school as their highest level of education and 42.9% stated that junior college or a vocational program has been their highest level of education. Furthermore, 42.9% of the



participants were second generation and 61.9% reported that they prefer to speak English. Eleven (52.4%) of the participants reported to be making \$10,000 to \$30,000 annually while 28.6% reported to be making less than \$10,000 annually.

Question one, two, and five were the same for both groups, college students and staff. However, question three and four were different.

#### College Students and Staff

Question One. Do you think it is important for Mexican Americans to pursue a higher education? Why or why not?

From the sample of 21 participants, 95% reported that it is important for Mexican Americans to pursue a higher education. Among this ninety-five percent, 45% thought that it is important because it will give them better jobs and more opportunities. In addition, they shared that education betters their lives and helps support their families.

However, among the sample of 16 college students, 31% stated that it is important for Mexican Americans to pursue a higher education to overcome stereotypes and to prove that they can succeed. For instance, one respondent stated, "Its very important for Mexican Americans to

pursue a higher education because of stereotypes and to try to better themselves. Especially for Mexican Americans because of the way they are perceived. They are perceived as lazy."

Question Two. How important is it for you to get an education? Has it always been that way for you? If it changed, when did it change? How does your family feel about education?

Among the sample of 16 college students, all reported that it was important for them to get an education. However, reasons for why they felt it was important to get an education varied. Sixty-eight percent had common themes. They stated that they felt it was important to get an education because they saw their parents struggling, they wanted to have something to fall back on, they wanted to better themselves, they wanted better jobs and more opportunities, or they wanted to prevent living up to the stereotypes of Mexican Americans. Examples of these responses are the following.

"For me personally its very important getting an education because I've seen what my parents have gone through. I've seen them trying to survive and trying to find us a place where we can live"

"I love education. Its not so much at the end of the tunnel you get a better job and you're going to make more money, but personally its like a self-fulfilling prophecy where I can say, "I did it!"

"I think a lot of people see us Mexicans as just popping kids. Its always been, 'you're Mexican and a Women, stay home and raise kids. I want to show them that yes I am a women and Mexican and I have dyslexia, but I can do it!"

On the other hand, 31% of the participants stated other reasons why they thought education was important for them.

"For me personally, its good to get an education as in that, I want to know everything to tell my children what I know. But really, its just to learn. I don't really see a career. I'm just looking to be smart. Like my mom says, 'just marry someone and be a good wife.'"

"I believe its important now because I have a family and my main priority is my wife and my children."

"After being in two abusive relationships, I figured, I'm better off divorced and going to school."

When the participants were asked, has education always been important for you, 62% stated that they have

always felt the same about education. However, 37% stated that it has changed.

"At one point, I wanted to be an orthodontist, but that went down the drain. When I was younger I didn't do very good in school and people were telling me that you were suppose to start very young and since I didn't, I basically couldn't do it anymore."

"After high school I had a job that paid me well and I was satisfied. However, once I had my children, I realized that I had let ten years go on by."

When participants were asked how their families felt about education, 50% clearly stated that their families think it is important for them to get an education.

"We are a family of 8 children, I'm the first one to go to college. It has always been important for my family because they both didn't make it to high school."

"My mom is a very strict Hispanic women. Her upbringing and my father's upbringing was that they would sacrifice to continue to allow their kids to educate themselves."

The other 50% of the participants stated that they didn't get the support or encouragement from their family to get an education.

"Growing up as an immigrant family and being first generation, education was never as important as an American family. Even though, yes you hear its important for you to go to school, there's no money, there's no inheritance, so there isn't really much talk about it."

"My mom feels that education is important. My dad says if your going to get an education, get it, if not, just get a job."

"My mom says, just marry someone and be a good wife. She would say, 'I hate school.' So, I never got the help I needed with my homework.

"Education in my family is a hard thing because were not used to talking about it."

As mentioned previously, staff also agreed that education was important to them for similar reasons as the college students. They reported that education was important to them for better jobs and more opportunities.

"It's important for me, that way I can help my family. If I get a better education, I can get a better job."

"For me its very important. If you don't study, you don't get ahead. You make minimum wage or they don't hire you or you end up mopping in a restaurant."

"I think it's very important because my parents didn't have the opportunity to get an education. For me, I consider myself lucky to have been born here."

Out of the five staff, 60% stated that education has always been important to them. However, two (40%) of them stated that it hasn't always been important to them.

"When my son was born, he was my main priority."

"Now that I am getting older, it has become important to me."

On the other hand, all five staff stated that their families strongly support education and encourage them to go. They feel that an education will give you a better paying job and a better life.

Question Five. In your opinion, what do you think can help Mexican Americans obtain a higher education?

For question five, participants gave a number of suggestions that could help Mexican American obtain a higher education. Thirty-one percent of college students stated that having information or exposure to education and being informed of its benefits is also helpful. In addition, 43.7% of the college students believed that support from family, friends, and school was important to help Mexican Americans obtain a higher education. Moreover, 31% stated that encouragement from home and

having parents involved makes a big difference. As for other responses, 18% of the participants also felt that motivation to go to school and financial aid was important. Other opinions indicated, role models, better conditions at school, and bilingual programs.

When the staff was asked question number five, their responses were similar to the college students. However, 60% stated that having motivation to go to college would help Mexican Americans obtain a higher education.

#### College Students

Question Three. What do you think discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education? From your experience, what were the challenges or barriers that you had to face in pursuing a higher education?

From the sample of 16 college students, 81% indicated that a lack of encouragement, lack of support from parents, or the lack of role models discouraged Mexican-Americans from obtaining a higher education. These were the common themes among the college students. In addition, among this 81%, the majority of them agreed that having to work and having financial problems also contributed to the discouragement of obtaining a higher education. An example of this response is the following.

"I think many things can be discouraging. I think it's the lack of support in the family. You hear it even up to this day, why are you getting an education, you doing okay! For some reason, it seems like they are satisfied or used to living the way they live and feel that it's ambitious to get an education and not really a necessity. So, there are a lot of put downs in the family."

Moreover, from the 81%, two college students also included community or neighborhoods as being a contributor to the discouragement of Mexican Americans.

"When you live in an area where most of the people are on welfare and gang banging, most people are just trying to survive."

Eighteen percent of the participants stated that problems at home, parents not being educated, a lack of inner-drive or motivation, being a minority, language barriers, and not be rewarded right away were factors discouraging a higher education.

When the 16 college students were asked to describe their own experiences of challenges and barriers to pursuing a higher education, the most common response was having to work because of financial problems (56%).



Nineteen percent stated that they were not motivated to go. For instance,

"The challenge I had to face was doing it. Going to school. It's a matter of you encouraging yourself. If you want it, you can do it."

The other 25% of the participants stated other challenges or obstacles that were not common responses. The obstacles or challenges they shared was their neighborhoods, being married young, learning the English language, put downs, or not getting their needs met. Pertaining to the response of not getting needs met, one respondent indicated: "I was placed in remedial classes most of the time. I was placed in cooking classes and I had to go back and say No I don't want cooking. I want to take typing. They didn't understand. The teachers would say this is what you qualify for."

Question Four. From your experience, what made it possible for you to go to college? When did you start going to college? Why did you choose to go to college? What is your educational goal?

Fifty-six percent stated that support from parents, grandparents, wife, children, or boyfriends has made it possible for them to go to college. Also, 43.7% stated that being motivated made it possible for them to go to

college. The other participants stated that what made it possible for them to go college was being informed about college, financial aid, grants, good instructors, living in better neighborhoods, or sports.

When the 16 college students were asked why they chose to go to college, 75% stated to have better opportunities, to get ahead, to have a better position, to better themselves, or to improve their lives. The other 25% stated because they wanted to make more money, they had to support their families, or they didn't want to live with their parents forever.

#### Staff

Question Three. What do you think discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education? Have there been any barriers preventing you from pursuing a higher education? Is there a particular reason why you had to work rather than attend school? Do you have family support?

Sixty percent of the staff believed what discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education is the language barriers and not having role models or mentors whom they can follow. On the other hand, 40% of the staff stated that what discourages them is having parents that work and who are not available but also the lack of money.

When the staff was asked about barriers preventing them from going to school, 60% stated similar barriers that prevented them from obtaining a higher education: they either got married young, became a teen mom, or had a family to support. One respondent also included because she was "lazy." The other two (40%) stated it was because they had to work. When the staff was asked why they had to work instead of going to school or why they didn't go to school, responses were either that they had to work or had to take care of their babies or families. In addition, it was also found that all five staff indicated that they had family support.

Question Four. Have you thought about going back to school? If so, when do you think you'll go back? What is preventing you to go at this moment? What could make it possible for you to go back to school?

All five staff participants stated that they have thought about going back to school, however, their reasons for not attending right at this moment is based on the same barriers that were preventing them from obtaining a higher education. (See question three.) On the other hand, when staff was asked what could make it possible for them to go back to school, their responses varied. Other responses included "If my health improves," " If they

offered Saturday classes," "If my husband gets a good job," "After I cope with the death of my father," and, "If I had the money."

#### Summary

Overall, Chapter four reviewed the results extracted from the project. It was found that two groups, college students and staff, do value education. They stated that education was important for Mexican-Americans and important to them because it gave them better opportunities and bettered their lives. In addition, it was found that the majority of the participants had similar experiences, obstacles, and barriers that hindered them from obtaining a higher education.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (N = 21)		
17-21	8	38.1%
22-28	4	19.0%
29-34	5	24.0%
35-44	4	19.0%
Gender (N = 21)		
Male	7	33.3%
Female	14	66.7%
Education level (N = 21)		
High School	12	57.1%
Junior college/Vocational	9	42.9%
Years in US (N = 21)		
11-20	7	33.3%
21-28	7	33.3%
29-36	7	33.3%
Marital Status (N = 21)		
Single	12	57.1%
Married	6	28.6%
Divorced	1	4.8%
Other	2	9.5%
Generation (N = 21)		
First	7	33.3%
Second	9	42.9%
Third	5	23.8%
Language Preference (N = 21)		
Spanish	4	19.0%
English	13	61.9%
Both	4	19.0%
Annual Income (N = 21)		
Less than 10,000	6	28.6%
10,000-30,000	11	52.4%
30,000-50,000	3	14.3%
50,000-70,000	1	4.8%

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions gleaned as a result of completing the project. Further, the recommendations extracted from the project are presented as well as the limitations of the study. Last, the chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine Mexican-Americans' values and attitudes toward education and to further explore some of the reasons Mexican-Americans drop out of school at such high rates. The research questions derived from the purpose of the study were: 1) Do Mexican-Americans really value education? 2) Do Mexican-American values and attitudes play a role in whether Mexican-Americans dropout of school or not? And, 3) What could be the situational or contributing factors that hinder academic achievement for Mexican-Americans?

To further explore and better understand the research questions above, five questions were given to two groups in the study: college students and staff. The researcher

interviewed a total of 21 participants (N = 21) and collected and compared responses to find common themes. As a result, the findings were reported by the frequency of common themes.

From the five questions, there were several significant findings that answered the questions of concern to the study. Based on the results of the study, Mexican-Americans do really value education. Not only does education appear to be important for Mexican-Americans but also the reasons for education being important are alike amongst a group of dissimilar people. It has been found that Mexican-American college students as well as other Mexican-Americans value education because it provides more opportunities, better jobs, better lives, helps support their families, and avoids stereotypes. Unexpectedly, both groups found education to be important. It was assumed that staff would not value education as much as college students would; however, this was not the case. Furthermore, it was shown that for both groups, more than half of the participants indicated that their parents support education, indicating that education is highly valued and encouraged in the homes of Mexican-Americans.

Based on the findings, it has shown that Mexican-Americans value education and encourages it at

home. If this is the case, what then justifies the high drop out rate among this ethnic group? Do values and attitudes play a role in whether Mexican-Americans drop out of school or not? According to the findings of the study, it is safe to say that they do not Mexican-Americans do value education.

Instead, rather than associating values and attitudes with drop out rates, the significant findings about possible causes of drop out rates are shown in the opinions and experiences of the participants. Eighty-one percent of the college participants shared that they thought a lack of encouragement, lack of support from parents, or the lack of role models discouraged Mexican-Americans from obtaining a higher education. In addition, among this 81%, the majority also agreed that financial problems and having to work were causes. As for the staff, 60% of the staff believed what discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education is language barriers and not having role models or mentors whom they can follow. Both staff and college students stated similar responses.

In regards to what could be the possible factors leading to drop outs among Mexican-Americans, all the participants indicated that they had various influencing



factors that hindered them from obtaining a higher education. As indicated in the results, fifty-six percent of college students stated that they had to work because of financial problems. Nineteen percent stated that they were not motivated to go. And, the other 25% stated the obstacles or challenges they shared were their neighborhoods, being married young, learning the English language, being put down, or not getting their needs met. On the other hand, 60% of the staff stated that because they either got married young, become a teen mom, or had a family to support and 40% stated it was because they had to work. Overall, In comparing the two groups' barriers and obstacles, it appeared that those already in college had major financial problems that got in the way of their education as opposed to those that are not in school. For those that were not currently attending school, it appeared that personal factors rather than situational factors more likely interfered with their obtaining a higher education. That is, they saw having their own families or putting family as a priority as an obstacle to obtaining a higher education.

Overall, findings indicate that there were no major differences with Mexican-Americans staff and college student's experiences. It has been found that these two

groups value education and their families do as well. In retrospect, it is found that what could account for such a high drop out rate for Mexican-Americans is the combination of barriers and obstacles experienced by each individual. Each individual has his or her own story of why it's been difficult to attend or to obtain a higher education. Therefore, what is important to understand is that barriers exist for everyone; however, prevention and suggestions should be considered in alleviating these barriers to help this ethnic group excel in education.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

There were several suggestions mentioned by the participants that could help Mexican-Americans obtain a higher education. These suggestions included, but were not limited to, having information or exposure to education and being informed of its benefits, having support from family, friends, and school, and also having encouragement from home and having parents involved. In addition, the study showed that the participants saw having motivation as being another suggestion to obtain a higher education.

When college students were asked what made it possible for them to go to school, fifty-six percent stated that support from parents, grandparents, wife,

children, or boyfriends has made it possible for them to go to college. Also, 43.7% stated that being motivated made it possible for them to go to college. Overall, what made it possible for them to go to school was overcoming their barriers. However, when staff was asked what would make it possible for them to go to school, it was interesting to see that their responses varied and did not pertain to the barriers they had, rather it was associated with their everyday stressors such health problems, time management, a better job for my husband, coping with the death of my father, and, having more money.

From the suggestions or recommendations provided by the participants of the study as well as their own personal successes in making it possible for them to obtain a higher education, it appears that there is a need for interventions and programs overlapping multiple needs. For instance, clearly there is a need for support and encouragement in a child's academic path. Therefore, having parents involved with their children's education appears to be important. Having parents attend meetings or conferences pertaining to their child's status in school is a way of encouragement. Also, helping their children with homework is a way of supporting them throughout their education.

Because parental involvement and support is important in a child's education, policies should focus on implementing parent centers in school grounds. Parents centers should aim at helping parents teach their children and become involved with their education. Also, parent centers should aim at helping parents become more informed and become more knowledgeable about the benefits of an education. Not only would this involve the parents more, but also the children will feel that they have a role model or positive figure to help them when they need assistance. Also, with regards to the Mexican-American population, it is also important to have bilingual staff working to assist this population to give better guidance to the parents.

Besides implementing parent centers in schools to involve parents with their children, policies should also aim towards hiring more school counselors and social workers. With more school counselors and social workers, and the involvement of parents and teachers, students can be provided with services that can target their different needs such as tutoring, individual counseling, and workshops aiming at self-esteem and diversity issues. This will promote a more collaborative effort by social workers, school counselors, teachers, and parents to work

together to improve the lives of the children academically and personally.

It is also important to provide intervention programs helping Mexican-American children cope with the different stressors in their lives. Perhaps, school social workers can offer mentorship programs, family therapy, and case management to families. Clearly, this study has shown that Mexican-Americans do value education, however, barriers such as financial problems hinder them from obtaining a higher education. As a result, it is important to offer family therapy and case management. Mexican-Americans often come from low-income families and lack resources. Because there is a lack of resources, children in the home feel obligated to help the family out by working, thus, giving them fewer opportunities to go to school. Mexican-American families need to know that there are alternatives to having their children work rather than go to school. There is financial aid, grants, scholarships, family assistance programs, and so forth.

Future research needs to focus on ways in which Mexican-American parents can be more helpful and encouraging to their children academically. There should be more research showing the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement for Mexican-Americans.

In addition, future research should focus more on the resiliency of Mexican-Americans. Research should be concerned with how children of different ethnic groups, low-income families, and those with multiple barriers overcome those stressors and excel. With that research, parents, teachers, and social workers, can learn different tools and interventions in approaching children at high risk of dropping out of school. Moreover, research needs to take into account the barriers and obstacles experienced by Mexican-Americans, and work with this population in finding ways to improve programs so that they are effective. Perhaps, research can evaluate different programs and interventions for this particular population.

Overall, research in schools and with families is needed for the betterment of the children. However, there is a concern of the limitations that may arise. Several limitations include: 1) it is difficult to study children who are not 18 years of age, 2) parents of Mexican-American children may not be interested in participating without incentives; this may create small samples for future research, and, 3) research in schools need to be approved by the districts superintendent as well as the school of target; some schools are not

interested because of the complications of getting parents and others involved.

For this particular study the limitations were minimized. The study's design was qualitative; therefore, the sample size did not have to be large. And, the age group utilized for this study was 18 years of age and older. Although limitations were minimized, a few were still apparent. First, the limitations of utilizing a qualitative study is that a small sample, in this case (N = 21), represents a large population of Mexican-Americans. Second, the researcher created the instrument; as a result, the reliability is questionable. However, on the other hand, as a graduate student, and as the researcher of this study, it was in my interest to document the experiences and responses of my participants. Since the study was qualitative, it was important to write notes, follow certain rules, and extract themes from the participants. With the guidance and experience of professors, I was able to use my judgment on what was important for this particular study.

### Conclusion

According to the results of the study, there is a great need for interventions and programs targeting

Mexican-Americans at risk of dropping out of school.

Studies have indicated that Hispanics have the highest school dropout rate of any single ethnic group (Baruth & Manning, 1992). Because Hispanics have the highest school dropout rates, this particular study was interested in examining the different factors that place, particularly, Mexican-American children at high risk of dropping out. From the contribution of the findings, schools, social workers, teachers, and Mexican-American families can benefit from knowing and understanding what factors contribute to their children completing school. This way, it can also better assist the Mexican-American community as a whole.



APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

## **Informed Consent**

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore some of the attitudes and values of Mexican-Americans toward education and to explore some of the reasons why Mexican-Americans drop out of school. This study is being conducted by Monica V. Pulido, graduate student of social work at California State University at San Bernardino under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary McCaslin. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with Monica V. Pulido that will take approximately 25-30 minutes. Five different questions will be asked during the interview process. The questions are concerned with your values and attitudes toward education, the barriers that you have experienced in the educational system, the obstacles that hinder Mexican-American in the educational system, and various demographic questions. It is the goal of this project to gain some insight into the issue of high drop out rates for Mexican-Americans as well to gain an understanding of the experiences of Mexican-Americans while going through our educational system.

Please understand that your participation in this research study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. Please also understand that you do not have to answer any question that you may not wish to answer. Please know that your responses in the interview will remain confidential and the results will be reported in group form only. When you are done with the interview, you will be given a debriefing statement.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

By my mark below indicates that, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

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Mark

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Date

APPENDIX B  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for participating in this study, conducted by Monica Pulido a graduate student at Cal State University, San Bernardino. The study that you have just completed was designed to explore the attitudes and values of Mexican-Americans toward education and to explore other factors that hinder Mexican-Americans in the educational system. It is the primary goal of this project to gain insight into the problem of the high drop out rate among Mexican-Americans as well as to explore the experiences of Mexican-Americans in our educational system.

This study deals with some sensitive issues regarding personal values and attitudes toward education, as well as the different experiences of Mexican-Americans while going through the educational system. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in the study, you are advised to contact Family Service Agency at (909) 338-4689.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507. This study will be completed in June 2003 and findings will be available after July in the Pfau Library at CSUSB and at the Superintendent office at Val Verde School district.

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHICS

### Demographics

1. Gender        \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Male        \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Martial Status  
\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Single  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Married  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Divorced  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Widowed  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of years in the United States: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Language preference: (Check one)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Spanish  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. English  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
6. Please identify with ONE of the following:  
I AM...  
\_\_\_\_\_ 1. First generation Latino/a (born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Second generation Latino/a (born in the United States and parents born in Mexico)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Third generation Latino/a (born in the United States, parents born in the United States, and grandparents born in Mexico).  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your highest level of education completed: (Check one)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Elementary school (1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Middle school (7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. High school (9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade)  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Junior college/ vocational school  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. 4 years of college  
\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Graduate/post graduate school

8. What is your annual income? (Check one)

- ☐ 1. Less than \$10,000
- ☐ 2. \$10, 000 – \$30, 000
- ☐ 3. \$30, 000 – \$50, 000
- ☐ 4. \$50, 000 - \$70, 000
- ☐ 5. \$70, 000 and over

APPENDIX D  
QUESTIONNAIRE



## **Instrument**

### **College Students**

1. Do you think it is important for Mexican Americans to pursue a higher education? Why or why not?
2. How important it is for you to get an education? Has it always been that way for you? If it changed, when did it change? How does your family feel about education?
3. What do you think discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education? From your experience, what were the challenges or barriers that you had to face in pursuing a higher education?
4. From your experience, what made it possible for you to go to college? When did you start going to college? Why did you choose to go to college? What is your educational goal?
5. In your opinion, what do you think can help Mexican Americans obtain a higher education?

### **Staff**

1. Do you think it is important for Mexican Americans to pursue a higher education? Why or why not?
2. How important it is for you to get an education? Has it always been that way for you? If it changed, when did it change? How does your family feel about education?
3. What do you think discourages Mexican Americans from obtaining a higher education? Have there been any barriers preventing you from pursuing a higher education? Is there a particular reason why you had to work rather than attend school? Do you have family support?
4. Have you thought about going back to school? If so, when do you think you'll go back? What is preventing you to go at this moment? What could make it possible for you to go back to school?
5. In your opinion, what can help Mexican Americans obtain a higher education?

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